

Multi-agency forums

Level 1 & Level 2

Who needs to be part of multi-agency forums for discussing extra-familial harm? How do you provide oversight for cases and contexts? Here we highlight the top things to consider when establishing a forum to provide oversight of multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm

When developing a Contextual Safeguarding (CS) approach, it is important to consider whether you have, or need to create, a structure to provide multi-agency oversight of responses to children and young people affected by extra-familial harm (EFH), and the contexts where that harm has occurred. Such forums draw together professionals and agencies to ensure all appropriate intervention or support in relation to young people and contexts is being undertaken, and that there is a cohesive multi-agency response to addressing concerns and building safety within communities.

Developing a new or adapting existing meeting structures can streamline what are often siloed review panels for issues such as sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, serious youth violence and teenage relationship abuse. In drawing together a range of existing meetings, an overarching EFH panel/meeting requires specific, action-focused objectives. It needs to go beyond discussing concerns to actively developing and overseeing interventions to reduce harm to children and young people across contexts.

The operating function for these meeting structures can vary dependent on local priorities, partnerships and wider practice approaches. Despite local variations, there are some key questions to consider when establishing or reviewing the operation of a panel/meeting: some relate to Level 1 and others to Level 2 of the CS framework.

Over-arching considerations

- What is the role and function of the panel/meetings?
- Can all forms of EFH be referred for discussion at such meetings?
- Who will chair the panel/meeting to ensure that multi-agency responses are contextually informed and child-welfare led? Is there a role for a joint chair?
- Is there a clear primary (core) membership identified for the panel? Does this include non-traditional as well traditional safeguarding partners?
- What is the referral pathway for professionals to discuss their concerns?
- How will you ensure that young people and families are aware of the referral and understand that personal information will be shared with other professionals?

Level one and level two

Level one

Does the local thresholds document provide mechanisms for screening referrals for children and families impacted by EFH – and can this be used to inform decisions at the panel?

Is there a thresholds document for contexts (peer groups, schools and neighbourhood settings) that can inform decisions to undertake context assessments?

Level two

Does the referral process address all contexts including: child/young person; home/family; peers; school/education; neighbourhoods and locations?

Does the referral process prompt professionals to include visual or pen narratives of a peer groups, school or neighbourhoods associated with the extra-familial concern?

Both levels

Are referrers encouraged to undertake context weighting to inform discussions about what context needs to change first to make things better for the young person or peer group?

Does panel membership provide sufficient coverage/oversight of the extra-familial contexts that may be referred into or discussed at meetings?

As well as review progress on individual young people and families affected by EFH, is there clarity regarding the role of the meeting to review actions arising from context assessments?